

THE BOOK OF JAMES

“To Be Religious”

Scripture Reading: JAMES 1:26-27

-) **SLIDES 1-6.** Bible Jeopardy!
-) **SLIDES 7.** Read today’s Scripture text.
-) **SLIDE 8.** We continue today in our expository study in the Book of JAMES. This is week #9. I have titled today’s message *“To Be Religious”* (1:26).
-) **SLIDE 9.** EPH 2:8-10. Let’s get our Christianity 101 theology correct. We are not saved (justified) by our works. Amen? We are saved by grace through faith. We are saved for good works and not by good works.
-) The gospel is simple. Trust and have faith in what Jesus accomplished through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave and we will be saved. Do not add anything to or take away from that. That is what the entire Book of GALATIANS is about. And Paul pronounces an anathema to those who teach and believe differently.
-) I mention this up front because I want to make sure we properly understand the teaching that James is about to give us in v26-27. I don’t want any confusion about what saves a person. So, let’s look at what James is writing.
-) **SLIDE 10.** JAMES 1:26-27. In these two verses, James uses the word *“religion”* and *“religious.”* I want to spend time talking about these two words this morning.
-) **SLIDE 11.** What is *“religion?”* WEBSTER.
-) **SLIDE 12.** What is *“religious?”* WEBSTER. A person having religion or being religious can be looked at in a positive way or in a negative way. It can be complex. Let’s keep it simple.

-) I am convinced that the difference in religion being positive or negative is the motive behind their faithful devotion. What are the person's intentions in their religious efforts, words, and actions? Let's look at "*religion*" from several different angles this morning.
-) **SLIDE 13.** By Webster's definition, a person is religious when they manifest faithful devotion to some reality or deity. First, let's look at faithful devotion to an ultimate reality.
-) We could say we are religious when we repeat the same practice over and over again (faithful devotion to an ultimate reality). "*I am very religious about cleaning up the kitchen after every meal.*" It is a practice I do over and over again. I have faithful devotion to this reality. Gail cooks. I clean up. There is nothing spiritual or faith-related in my actions.
-) **SLIDE 14.** But a person can also have faithful devotion to an ultimate deity. We see this in many different pagan religions around the world today. People will perform some act over and over again and it is nothing more than faithful devotion to their ultimate deity—whoever or whatever that deity may be.
-) Can this practice be negative or unfruitful in some way? What are their motives in being "*religious*" in this way? Let's look at two Biblical examples of religious activity focused incorrectly.
-) **SLIDE 15.** MATT 6:7. People were using many repetitious words when praying. What was their motive in doing so? To them, the more repetitious the words, the better their chances their deity would hear them. It was a religious practice. It was faithful devotion to an ultimate deity. And Jesus says that such a religious practice is unnecessary. Don't do that.
-) **SLIDE 16.** Pagan and traditional practices were also bleeding over into the early Christian church. COLOSSIANS 2:20-23. What were these early church Christians doing? They were performing pagan religious practices.

-) **SLIDE 17.** COL 2:20-23. They were following the traditions of men. Why? Because that is what they were taught by the religious leaders of Judaism.
-) We know from reading the gospels that the religious leaders of that time were all about obedience to both the Mosaic Law but more about being obedient to the traditions of men. Why? Our obedience is how we work our way to heaven. Do this. Don't do that.
-) It was faithful devotion to an ultimate deity. And the motive was all about earning or contributing to their salvation.
-) **SLIDE 18.** COL 2:20-23. What was their religious motive here? They were abusing their own bodies in an effort to restrain sin so they could please God. And Paul concludes by saying these things are of no value.
-) These are three examples of false religious practices. Don't speak repetitious prayers. Don't follow the traditions of men which are not Biblical. And don't abuse your body thinking your self-abasement pleases God in any way.
-) Religion. Faithful devotion to an ultimate deity. We have this faithful devotion to a deity (God) not because we want God to hear us, or not because we are trying to please God, or not because we are trying to earn our salvation.
-) **SLIDE 19.** So, why DO we have faithful devotion to our God? Why does James talk about our religion? What makes the religion of the Christian a positive thing? EPHESIANS 2:10. Because we HAVE been saved, our good works are the proper response to our faith. This is our motive.
-) **SLIDE 20.** But not everyone's motives are pure. JAMES 1:26. It appears that there were some who claimed they were of the brethren, but their tongue was not the best evidence of that. Maybe this gets back to v13 where the brethren were saying that God was tempting them to sin. O hush your tongue!

-) Guys ... you are giving Christianity a bad name. And who knows what other words were being spewed from this thing (tongue) right here. We will focus a lot more on our words and this thing (tongue) when we get to chapter three. But allow me to add a few Biblical truths about the tongue.
-) **SLIDE 21.** What does Jesus say about the relationship between the heart and the mouth? LUKE 6:45. What's in here (heart) comes out here (mouth).
-) **SLIDE 22.** JAMES 1:26. And James is saying the same thing here in v26. Is your motive pure for your religion—your faithful devotion to an ultimate deity? Your tongue will speak what your heart is thinking.
-) **SLIDE 23.** In v27 James tells us what our "*religion*" what our faithful devotion to our God should look like. JAMES 1:27.
-) Of all the virtuous acts a Christian could do, why did James choose visiting orphans and widows to be the poster child for pure and undefiled religion? I think it's because he may have hung around his big brother a lot.
-) **SLIDE 24.** JOHN 13:34-35. Many acts can display love and compassion. But the Bible quite often focuses on taking care of orphans and widows (those less fortunate) as something we all should be doing. Since they are unable to reciprocate in any way, caring for them clearly demonstrates true sacrificial Christian love. Giving without asking for anything in return is a very loving thing to do.
-) **SLIDE 25.** JAMES 1:27. James gives a second example for what our religion should look like. This covers a lot of ground.
-) But I'd like to simplify this statement by saying this: instead of the world being our influence and our worldview, let's have the Word of God be our influence and let's all have a Biblical worldview. The Christian has the mind of Christ.

-) Many people are convinced that religion will save a person. Religion allows them to ascend to God with all their good works. They will look at JAMES 1:26-27 and use that as proof text that if they take care of widows and orphans, that will help them earn their salvation. Their works lets them ascend to God.
-) But we do not and cannot ascend to God for salvation. God must come down and meet us. And that is what He has done through the person of Jesus Christ.
-) In a few weeks we will be looking at chapter 2:14-26. These verses focus on faith and works and the relationship between the two. We covered a little bit of that today, but we'll be full speed ahead with those verses at that time.
-) And as we dive into that chapter in JAMES, we will see where other faiths outside of true Christianity will use JAMES 2:14-26 to justify that works must contribute to one's salvation. BGCC, it's going to get very interesting.
-) Religion. A system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices. And religion is not necessarily a bad thing when our motives are pure and undefiled. Jesus says do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. But let's understand this. Religion is the result of our salvation, and never a contribution towards it.

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